

and Girls Club. In addition, she was elected President of the Yuma County Education Foundation, Somerton's Rotary Club, and Yuma County's School District Association.

Mrs. Bobbitt has demonstrated great leadership and thousands of students are now beneficiaries of her vision of equality and personal best.

I would like to personally commend Mrs. Judith Bobbitt for her tireless commitment to our community. Her life and work is an inspiration to us all.

TRIBUTE TO DENNIS E. NIXON

HON. HENRY CUELLAR

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 25, 2006

Mr. CUELLAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Dennis E. Nixon, Chairman of International Bancshares Corporation (IBC), on his being selected as an inductee into the 2006 Texas Business Hall of Fame on October 26, 2006.

Mr. Nixon is widely recognized as one of the nation's leading banking authorities. Since joining IBC in 1975, he has been instrumental in the ranking of the bank as the largest minority-owned bank organization in the United States with assets of \$10.3 billion with over 200 full service branches throughout Texas and Oklahoma in over eighty communities. IBC is headquartered in the City of Laredo and employs over three thousand in the South Texas region and in Oklahoma.

Mr. Nixon's approach to banking is based at the community level in which all customers large and small retain the same value, and this approach has been achieved through the involvement of IBC in community service. Mr. Nixon believes in the importance of corporate social responsibility, and has encouraged his employees to be active volunteers in community service with various non-profit organizations. As a result, IBC was the winner of the 2001 Governor's Volunteer Award in the corporate business category.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to honor Dennis E. Nixon, Chairman of International Bancshares Corporation, in recognition of his selection as an inductee into the 2006 Texas Business Hall of Fame.

TRIBUTE TO CITY OF GAITHERSBURG

HON. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 25, 2006

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate the City of Gaithersburg on its tenth anniversary as a "CHARACTER COUNTS! City."

Gaithersburg exemplifies the six pillars of a "CHARACTER COUNTS! City"—trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Today, Gaithersburg celebrates its continued success in serving its citizens and teaching its children the importance of good character.

The CHARACTER COUNTS! program in Gaithersburg began in a meeting room filled

with parents and children eager to learn the pillars of the program. In just over 10 years, the ideals of CHARACTER COUNTS! have spread through businesses and schools. Today, Gaithersburg has experienced the benefits of ethical education and has grounded the goals of the City in the ethical framework of the CHARACTER COUNTS! program.

Through learning and focusing on customer needs, Gaithersburg seeks to continue the honest and open communication that has helped it become a nationally renowned city. Gaithersburg utilizes creativity and fiscal responsibility to promote its health and excellence. All of the people of Gaithersburg—city officials, employees, neighborhood and governmental agencies—strive to continuously improve the City through cooperation and an increased emphasis on customer service, which allows community needs to be identified and met.

By maintaining the best aspects of a small town while implementing the most advanced new technologies, Gaithersburg has a diverse array of wonderful characteristics. The residents of Gaithersburg benefit from safe neighborhoods and diverse transportation options. Elected officials have united to create a favorable business environment and to preserve beautiful parks and public places. Gaithersburg is justifiably proud of its family-friendly environment and a citizenry that possesses a strong sense of community and individual responsibility.

I am pleased to honor the City of Gaithersburg for its outstanding commitment to values in its governance and daily life. Gaithersburg is a great place to live, work, learn and play, and I congratulate it on its tenth anniversary as a CHARACTER COUNTS! City.

INTRODUCTION OF SEEDS FOR SOLDIERS ACT

HON. TOM UDALL

OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 25, 2006

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce the Seeds for Soldiers Act. As a nation currently welcoming home new veterans, we must do all we can do to assist them upon their return. One way to do that is to help them jumpstart their new small businesses.

This bill does this by creating a specialized loan program for veterans through the Small Business Administration, which provides veterans with loans up to \$3 million, allows for debt refinancing, and permits borrowers to defer payments for up to one year without any accumulation of interest. To encourage lenders to provide capital, the program will carry reduced costs and a higher government loan guarantee.

The bill also establishes a vocational rehabilitation program for veterans specifically designed to assist in the transition out of service. The program, which will be established by existing Small Business Development Centers, will provide technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial assistance to veterans to help them use their skills learned in the military to open, maintain, and expand their own business. The bill authorizes \$25 million in funding to provide \$500,000 grants to the SBDCs to open this program.

As a member of both the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and the Small Business Committee, I am well acquainted with the difficulties many vets face in establishing and sustaining small businesses. At a time when thousands of veterans are returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan, we must act in every way possible to assist them when they return. This bill provides the seeds for veteran-owned businesses, so that they may grow into sustainable entities.

I am pleased to introduce this legislation today and wish to thank original cosponsors Representatives EMERSON, KELLY, and MICHAUD for their support. I urge my colleagues to join us in supporting both our veterans, and the benefits that small businesses contribute to our economy, by cosponsoring this bill.

30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WILLOWS THEATRE COMPANY

HON. GEORGE MILLER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 25, 2006

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 30th anniversary of the Willows Theatre Company in Concord (Contra Costa County), California and the major, positive impact it has had—and continues to have—in the cultural life of the San Francisco Bay Area.

For three decades, the Willows has developed and produced dramas, comedies and musicals—more than 210 in all—drawn from contemporary American playwrights, composers and lyricists for a mix of world or area premieres and revivals of classic American shows. Six productions a year, for a total of 244 performances, attract thousands of loyal patrons each year. The current patron base has grown to more than 4,500 subscribers, with renewals at an enviable 87 percent. The company is training theater artists, and creating viable relationships with playwrights, designers, actors and students whose work will impact current and future audiences and artists.

Over the past 4 years alone, the Willows has earned 17 awards from the Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle. The Arts and Culture Commission of Contra Costa County honored Richard Elliott, artistic director, in 2000 and Andrew Holtz, managing director, in 2004 with Arts Recognition Awards. In 2002, the San Francisco Business Arts Council presented its Cyril Award for Non-Profit Arts Excellence to the Willows.

Aside from its renowned artistic successes, the Willows also is an economic force in the community. With an annual budget approaching \$2 million, the company maintains facilities, employs administrative support staff, and affords the first opportunity for professional employment for many developing theater artists. The company was the first theater in Contra Costa County to operate under a seasonal contract with Actors Equity Association, with as many as 200 or more professional and non-union Bay Area artists employed during a season.

In support of other non-profit arts organizations throughout the region, the Willows operates a Community Box Office service that has